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Research Report

WOMEN SPEAK: THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH ON WOMAN ABUSE

RR2000-14e

This document was prepared by
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The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors
and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice Canada
or the Department of Health Canada.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse examined the community-based research process used in the *Ontario Rural Woman Abuse Study (ORWAS)*, which was implemented in the fall of 1997. *ORWAS* was an initiative of the Department of Justice Canada in partnership with the Community Abuse Program of Rural Ontario (CAPRO). Health Canada supplied interdepartmental financial support for the initiative.

The *Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse* project began in January 1999 under the joint sponsorship of Justice Canada and Health Canada. The objectives of the project were: 1) to review the research process developed through *ORWAS* and draw some conclusions about the value of a community-based approach; 2) to investigate the effects of participating in woman abuse research on the survivors, community researchers, and project leaders; and 3) to examine the benefits to government and communities of a collaborative partnership.

Telephone interviews were conducted with 21 survivors, 4 community researchers, and 3 project leaders. Quotations from the interviews are presented as they relate to the three objectives of the project.

Ristock and Pennell (1996) describe a methodology for conducting community-based research that they call "Research as Empowerment". This methodology served as the theoretical framework for the objectives of the *Women Speak* project. "Research as Empowerment" involves people in research who are not normally considered to have research skills, as a way of including alternative views and representing multiple perspectives. *ORWAS* can be considered "Research as Empowerment" in that it was democratic in the design process, involving the community researchers in all aspects of the research. Through the provision of skills, confidence, and support, the *ORWAS* study laid the groundwork for community action by contributing to the empowerment of the community researchers. The steps to promote community action on woman abuse are discussed with reference to a framework supplied by Horvath (1999).

Research Process

As shown in *ORWAS*, a collaborative process can yield greater understanding while providing a way to do research on rural woman abuse in a respectful, meaningful way. One important aspect of the approach used in the *ORWAS* study is that the words and experiences of survivors were central to the method, the findings and the reports. By putting the survivors' views front and centre in the project, *ORWAS* ensured that the survivors felt that they were respected throughout the process.

The *ORWAS* project leaders assigned great importance to using a community-based approach and they were committed to "giving something back" to the communities. By choosing researchers who knew their communities well and by respecting their knowledge, this process underscored the belief that locale is relevant in the analysis of woman abuse. The community researchers believed that the community-based method made the project stronger, the findings more significant and the experience more memorable for all who participated. It was the leaders'

opinion that the use of community members as researchers achieved data of greater quality and depth than would have been possible with researchers from outside the survivors' communities.

Effects of Participating

With respect to the effects of participating in community-based research, the benefits clearly outweighed the drawbacks for the women survivors as well as the researchers. Many spoke of gains in self-confidence and of the positive experience of being part of such a project. They felt that the qualitative research method was respectful of the survivors' experiences and feelings, and that the interviews allowed survivors to tell their stories and to be listened to in a supportive setting. Although the process raised some negative emotions and physical symptoms in survivors, community researchers and project leaders, these negative effects were offset by the feeling that something positive could come out of the research. No one regretted her participation in the *ORWAS* study; in fact, all the survivors said they would not hesitate to do it again if asked. The community researchers felt that they had gained a great deal through their participation in the research. They increased their knowledge of woman abuse issues, built up their research skills, met and were inspired by courageous survivors, and spent enjoyable and productive time working on an important issue with other community researchers and project leaders. The project leaders described the excitement of working in such depth with community members and with survivors of woman abuse.

Benefits of Partnership

Justice Canada partnered with the Community Abuse Program of Rural Ontario (CAPRO) in order to conduct the community-based research in *ORWAS*. This partnership provides an example of some of the mutual benefits of government/community partnering. Access to the knowledge and human resources based in communities (facilitated by CAPRO) contributed to the depth and strength of the research. The next steps toward community action on woman abuse may arise from the groundwork laid by this research partnership. The example of the *ORWAS* project also highlights the unique role that government can play in initiating research of such broad scope.

Recommendations

Recommendations are provided for researchers who plan to use a community-based research process to study violence against women, drawing from the case study of the *ORWAS* project. Recommendations regarding the research process suggest that community-based methods are valid and valuable approaches for the study of woman abuse. Recommendations regarding the effects of the research suggest that sensitivity can and must be incorporated into all aspects of woman abuse research, in order for the process to minimise negative effects and even to create some positive outcomes. Recommendations regarding the government/community partnership suggest ways that multiple benefits can be realised for survivors, communities, community organisations and government.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Origins of *Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse*

A community-based research project to study rural woman abuse (*Ontario Rural Woman Abuse Study: ORWAS*) was implemented in the fall of 1997. It was part of an initiative of the Department of Justice Canada in partnership with the Community Abuse Program of Rural Ontario (CAPRO). Health Canada supplied interdepartmental financial support for the initiative. The *ORWAS* project was used as the backdrop to the present study, which examines the value of community-based methodology in research on woman abuse.

Community-based methods such as that used in the *ORWAS* project recognise that the people who live in a community may hold different perspectives on an issue than people who look at the community from the outside. Therefore, in order for research to get a clear understanding of an issue in a community, it is important to involve people from the community in the design of the study, and in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data.

For many of the women involved in the *ORWAS* project, it was their first experience with community-based research. The choice of a community-based method entailed significant commitments of time and resources on the part of all those involved. The research team found that the project evolved in a dynamic way as a result of the group process. It demanded great flexibility from all members of the team and yielded rich rewards in terms of the relationships that developed among the team members.

It was this dynamic process and its effects on the participants that captured the interest of Health Canada and prompted the decision to do a follow-up study on *ORWAS*, which is the present *Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse*. One of the *ORWAS* community researchers, Mary Nelder, was interested in exploring the impact this unique process had on both the research team and the participating survivors. Her discussions with survivors in the Espanola area suggested that the project had made a significant impression on some of the women who had participated. Along with her associate, Susan Snelling, she approached the other community researchers and project leaders with a proposal to initiate a follow-up study that would examine the *ORWAS* process and explore its effects on all of the participants. The follow-up study would also explore the implications of the *ORWAS* experience for research on family violence more generally.

With the support of the research team, the *Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse* project began in January 1999 under the joint sponsorship of Justice Canada and Health Canada. It examined the community-based process used in *ORWAS* from the perspectives of the project leaders from Justice Canada and CAPRO, the community researchers, and the women survivors who participated. Throughout this report, the *Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on*

Woman Abuse project will be referred to as the "follow-up" project to distinguish it from the original *ORWAS* project.

The objectives of the *Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse* project were: 1) to review the research process developed through *ORWAS* and draw some conclusions about the value of a community-based approach; 2) to investigate the effects of participating in woman abuse research on the survivors, community researchers, and project leaders; and 3) to examine the benefits to government departments and communities of a collaborative partnership.

Although the *ORWAS* study was used as a case study for these questions, the implications of the findings go beyond *ORWAS*. The findings and conclusions, therefore, will be of interest to community-based organisations, women's groups, government researchers and the academic community.

1.2 Background on the Purpose and Methodology of ORWAS

The *ORWAS* project sought to understand issues of violence against women in rural areas. Because most studies of domestic violence have been based in urban areas, the *ORWAS* study was developed as part of a strategy to understand and better respond to women living with abuse in rural areas specifically. The purpose of the project was two-fold: to obtain a better understanding of the unique challenges for rural women experiencing violence; and second, to identify the particular and appropriate supports and interventions that were effective for rural women living with abuse.

Because it was imperative that the research skills came from and were kept in the community, CAPRO recruited six community researchers from rural areas across Ontario (representing South Eastern, South Central, South Western, North Eastern, North Central and North Western areas of the province). Previous research experience was not necessary since these community researchers were to be trained by the principal researchers from Justice Canada. It was considered vitally important that all community researchers be comfortable with the material and the process before commencing the data collection phase. Three training sessions were held in the fall and winter of 1997-98, prior to the data collection process. During the data collection phase of the project, conference calls allowed the research team to keep in contact. Justice Canada, with additional support from Health Canada, contributed funding for community researcher honoraria and travel expenses, and also provided in-kind supports such as research materials and conference calls.

The team of six community researchers, two Justice Canada researchers and the co-ordinator of CAPRO jointly developed the research scope, themes and interview guides. Each community researcher then interviewed ten women from her community who had survived a violent relationship. The term 'survivor' in this document refers to the women who were interviewed for the *ORWAS* project. These survivors are women who have

experienced a violent intimate relationship, have been living without violence for at least one year, and were not involved in any court action.

In an effort to broaden the scope of the study, the community researchers also conducted two or three focus groups with local service providers, community members and community leaders. Each researcher contacted the nearest shelter to inform them of the study and to solicit their support. All six shelters were supportive, some offering space, others referrals, others participating in the focus groups.

The interviews with the survivors and focus groups were tape-recorded and sent to Ottawa for transcription by Justice Canada staff. Transcribers were instructed to remove any references that could identify the participants. Each survivor's transcript was returned to her for editing, if she chose to do so. Tapes were also returned to the participants if they requested them; if not, they were destroyed. Once edited, the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were used as the data for the project.

After all the transcripts had been returned to the community researchers, each researcher identified themes arising from her data. The community researchers then came together in Ottawa in the spring of 1998 to discuss the process, identify common themes and analyse findings.

It was decided that participants needed to receive something back fairly quickly which reflected their participation and captured the specific issues that were identified in each community. Using a common framework, the community researchers wrote individual community draft reports. Conference calls once again kept the team in touch while they wrote the individual community reports. These drafts were distributed to the survivors for their feedback. The community reports were completed by the end of 1998 and were distributed to the participants and community organisations.

The *ORWAS* team met again to present their findings for the first time publicly at the *Communities against Violence* conference organised by CAPRO in December 1998. In a workshop following this conference, researchers reflected on the research process, discussed the contents of the upcoming synthesis report, and identified possible future directions. In 1999, a synthesis report was written (In Press), describing the *ORWAS* project and uniting the findings from the six communities into a single report on rural woman abuse.

The methodology developed for *ORWAS* was replicated in two rural sites in British Columbia. A list of all reports related to *ORWAS*, including the community reports, the synthesis report and the BC report, can be found in Appendix A.

1.3 Methodology *of Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse*

In the follow-up to *ORWAS*, four of the original six community researchers were interviewed. Mary Nelder, who initiated and conducted this follow-up study with her associate, Susan Snelling, had been one of the six community researchers, but because of her role as researcher in the follow-up study, she was not interviewed as one of the community researchers. Circumstances did not allow one other community researcher to take part in this follow-up project.

A conference call to discuss the research aspects of the *ORWAS* project was conducted in January 1999 with the community researchers. Subsequently, individual telephone interviews that centred on the personal implications of the project were conducted in January and February.

The community researchers were then asked to contact the survivors they had interviewed for the *ORWAS* study to ask them to participate in the follow-up study. The community researchers were provided with information, response cards and stamped envelopes to distribute to women who agreed to consider participating. The survivors could choose to respond by mailing back a response card giving a first name and telephone number. This process mimicked the recruitment process used in *ORWAS* and, therefore, was familiar to the survivors.

As noted, one community researcher did not take part in the follow-up. As a result, the ten survivors she interviewed for the *ORWAS* project could not be asked to participate in the follow-up study, because our contact with survivors was made through the community researchers. Therefore, the pool of survivors from which the follow-up study drew was smaller than anticipated (50 rather than 60). Replies were received from survivors from all the remaining areas covered by the *ORWAS* study. Telephone interviews were completed in February and March 1999, with all of the 21 women who responded.

The two project leaders from Justice Canada were interviewed individually by telephone in March 1999. A telephone interview was also conducted with the co-ordinator of CAPRO.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, following a standard set of questions concerning the project objectives (see below). The interviewer varied from the suggested questions as necessary to explore emerging issues, clarify the meaning of the question, or probe for clarification of an answer. The questions were asked in an order that flowed from the content of the interview, rather than in a prescribed order.

Interview Themes for Women Survivors

Objective 1: Research Process

- Assessment of method.

Objective 2: Effects

- Reasons for participating.
- Comparison of expected versus actual effect of participating.
- Emotional effects of participating.

Objective 3: Benefits

- Outcomes.
- Assessment of value of participating.
- Assessment of the community report.

Interview Themes for Community Researchers

Objective 1: Research Process

- Assessment of method.
- Assessment of community-based approach.
- Assessment of group process among researchers.
- Assessment of data analysis process.

Objective 2: Effects

- Reasons for participating.
- Comparison of expected versus actual effect of participating.
- Emotional effects of participating.

Objective 3: Benefits

- Outcomes.
- Assessment of value of participating.
- Assessment of the community report.

Interview Themes for Project Leaders

Objective 1: Research Process

- Key factors in developing the project.
- Assessment of method.
- Assessment of community-based approach.
- Assessment of group process among researchers.
- Assessment of data analysis process.
- Assessment of the final report.

Objective 2: Effects

- Comparison of expected versus actual effect of participating.
- Emotional effects of participating.

Objective 3: Benefits

- Outcomes.

- Impact of study within Justice Canada and CAPRO.
- Assessment of value of participating.
- Assessment of the community report.

Each researcher transcribed the verbatim from each of the interviews that she had conducted. Data were analysed in terms of themes emerging from the interviews concerning each objective. Based on the themes covered in the interview questions, each interview transcript was coded in terms of the theme addressed in each comment. In some cases, more than one theme was addressed in a single comment. Other themes that had not been part of the initial questions were also coded. The coded transcripts were then sorted, so that the portions of the interview that dealt with each objective and theme were categorised together. From this sorted data, representative quotations were identified and are presented in this document under each objective.

1.4 Structure of Report

The remainder of this report describes and analyses the findings of the follow-up study. First, an overview of the outcomes of the *Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse* project is presented in terms of the three objectives. Interview material is then presented separately for each group: survivors, community researchers and project leaders. Discussion of this material, and recommendations based on analysis of the interviews follows, and is organised around the objectives. The report finishes with a concluding section.

2.0 OVERVIEW

2.1 The *ORWAS* Methodology: Empowerment Through Research

Although a complete review of the theory of empowering research approaches is beyond the scope of this report, an attempt will be made at a limited review. Participatory research methods are increasingly being used in research projects with empowerment aims (Brydon-Miller, 1997). One common assumption of participatory approaches is that participants will be empowered by the research to act on their own behalf, and that as a result, actions will be taken. The action, or change, should be to the benefit of the participants and/or the community.

Ristock and Pennell (1996) describe a methodology for conducting community-based research that they call "Research as Empowerment". This is a process that is similar in many respects to participatory action research (PAR), but differs with regard to the initiation of the research. Participatory action research methodology assumes that a group of community members and stakeholders instigate the research and participate in all aspects of the research process. Research as Empowerment, "while often carried out in collaborative working groups, does not require such a format. It may well involve researchers and participants with different degrees of involvement in the process." (Ristock and Pennell, 1996, p. 17)

Research as Empowerment involves people in research who are not normally considered to have research skills, as a way of including alternative views and representing multiple perspectives. The responsibility for setting the direction of the research is not vested only in the researcher. Research as Empowerment, "even though it does not require a formal participatory group, does not leave the researcher floundering alone to determine the research question and design." (Ristock and Pennell, 1996, p. 17) These matters are decided through the involvement of people affected by the research. Through involvement, Research as Empowerment "strengthens its practitioners. Empowerment promotes the building of confidence, skills, and support networks." (Ristock and Pennell, 1996, p. 17)

The *ORWAS* project, as a community-based process, has similarities to participatory research. The Justice Canada researchers were familiar with participatory methodology and implemented many of its principles in *ORWAS*. While the *ORWAS* team did not come together as a grass-roots initiative (a PAR concept), it did have some degree of involvement for the survivors, in that their feedback was sought on the transcripts and community reports. Furthermore, *ORWAS* was democratic in the research design process, through the involvement of the community researchers in all aspects of the research. This study demonstrates that the community researchers experienced increased confidence and skill levels as a result of their participation. Therefore, the *ORWAS* methodology can accurately be described as Research as Empowerment.

The *Women Speak: The Value of Community-Based Research on Woman Abuse* undertook to examine the *ORWAS* project as a case study. The desire was to investigate the value of the process through the eyes of the participants, to determine what effects, if any, it had on those who participated, and to assess the collaboration between government and community in terms of benefits for both parties. This base was then used to identify the steps necessary for community change to occur.

2.2 Objective One: To Review the Research Process

The *ORWAS* project studied rural woman abuse by consulting women who have experienced domestic violence, letting them tell about their experiences in their own words. Thus, the project provided direct access to the views of survivors of violence. In this way, it helped develop our understanding of how domestic violence affects those most vulnerable to it: women and children.

The researchers were successful in finding a way to conduct research on rural woman abuse in a respectful, meaningful way. One significant aspect of the study is that the words and experiences of survivors were central to the method, the findings and the reports. In designing the *ORWAS* project, the researchers were guided by the principle that women's ideas and experiences matter. The interview method of women talking with other women in a safe, familiar environment using a semi-structured format allowed for the collection of rich data that may not have been accessible any other way. This dedication to hearing the voices of survivors of woman abuse has resulted in a meaningful, contextualised piece of research that has important implications for future research and policy.

Ethical issues concerning power and the roles of the researchers and participants were fundamental to the *ORWAS* project. The methodology attempted to give the survivors a sense of control over the uses of the data by soliciting their feedback on the transcripts and the draft community reports and by ensuring that their suggestions were incorporated. It was important to the Justice Canada researchers to minimise the exploitation of the participants in this research context. Respect for the investment and the contribution that people made to the study was a guiding principle of the project.

The determination to reduce the inherent power imbalance between researcher and participant was most obvious in the relationship of the project leaders with the community researchers. *ORWAS* was democratic in the research design process through involvement of the community researchers in all aspects of the research. Through collective decision making, data analysis and report writing, the entire project became a team effort. Community researchers' views were sought and respected, yielding a high level of commitment to the project and a sense of empowerment among the community researchers.

The project leaders assigned great importance to valuing the community perspective and they were committed to "giving something back" to the communities. By choosing community researchers who knew their communities well, and by respecting their knowledge, *ORWAS* underscored the belief that locale is relevant in the analysis of woman abuse. By building skills among community people, by contributing to the empowerment of survivors and community researchers, and by engaging community members in dialogue about how they respond to violence, *ORWAS* laid the groundwork for social action on rural woman abuse.

2.3 Objective Two: To Investigate the Effects on the Participants

Asking people to participate in this kind of research raises an important ethical issue in that there is the possibility that the women may be harmed by having to relive their painful experiences. Follow-up with the survivors indicates that, although there were some difficult memories associated with participation in the project, the women felt that the benefits of participating outweighed the drawbacks. None of the women interviewed in the follow-up regretted her decision to participate. This is an important finding for future research on woman abuse. Although safeguards for the participants (such as sensitive interviewers, confidentiality and security measures) need to be in place, there do not appear to be any effects of participating that would put the entire research process into question.

Whether the research process actually had positive, empowering effects on the survivors is less clear: the women interviewed were more likely to say it was their life experiences that had strengthened them, not the *ORWAS* project. Some of the survivors, although not all, describe being empowered through *ORWAS*. They feel stronger and better about themselves, and they feel hopeful that change may happen as a result of their participation in the study. Many of the women, although once again not all, thought that they would like to be even more involved in a similar future study.

Although the community researchers and project leaders were also negatively affected by exposure to the accounts of the survivors, the emotional difficulties that this presented were balanced by feelings of respect and admiration for the survivors, and personal growth as a result of hearing about the women's experiences. Again, with the basic safeguards in place, it appears possible to engage in this kind of in-depth research on violence against women without fear of undue harm to the participants or the researchers.

Community researchers were able to identify many benefits of their participation in the project. The tangible rewards of increased research skills and increased knowledge about violence issues were augmented by the development of a significant bond with the other members of the research team. Project leaders from Justice Canada and CAPRO as well as the six community researchers all expressed their appreciation for having had the opportunity to be a part of a unique experience. In spite of time pressures and little monetary reward, the members of the research team were strongly committed to the project and felt enriched by their participation in it.

2.4 Objective Three: To Examine the Benefits to Government and Community of a Collaborative Partnership

Another important part of the *ORWAS* process involved the collaborative partnership between a government department and a community organisation, and, through CAPRO, with six rural communities. *ORWAS* provides an example of some of the mutual benefits of government/community partnering. It also highlights the unique position of the federal government to be able to initiate such a process. In light of the current discussion about the need for government research to be connected to stakeholder communities, the *ORWAS* partnership moved beyond discussion into action. The benefits of this partnership will accrue to all parties involved.

Benefits to Communities and Community Organisations

The *ORWAS* community reports have given six communities in rural Ontario the information necessary to develop local strategies for more effective intervention in cases of woman abuse. It may also prove to be an effective lobbying tool for CAPRO and other organisations interested in influencing local, provincial and federal policy on woman abuse.

The project raised awareness of the issue in the local communities. By participating in the focus group discussions, community leaders, service providers and other community members gave their attention to the unique needs of abused women in their community and examined their community's response to those needs. Survivors developed a new sense of the extent of the problem in their own communities. In some places the media covered this project, thus expanding the number of people exposed to the discussion. This increased awareness can provide the impetus for action while the community focus group data may give CAPRO direction for change.

Individual researchers in each of the six communities have benefited from this project. Besides having a heightened awareness of the issue, they describe feeling more knowledgeable and more confident about their ability to address woman abuse issues. *ORWAS* created the opportunity for a unique research experience for these six women. By developing research skills among these community members, the project succeeded at "leaving the skills behind in the community", which was one of the central aims of the project. By building skills locally, the project also fits with CAPRO's overall community development approach.

Benefits to Government

ORWAS has provided Justice Canada (and other federal and provincial government departments) with valuable new information to assist with policy on rural and violence issues. *ORWAS* succeeded at providing insight into the experiences of rural women specifically, and in studying this group, the research addressed a gap in the literature. This documentation of the experiences of rural abused women highlights those factors

that are uniquely rural and allows for comparison with the majority of research on violence that focuses on the experiences of urban women.

As a documentation of the women's experiences with the criminal justice system, health care and social service agencies, *ORWAS* provided valuable information regarding the institutional response to victims of domestic violence. The project provided insight into strategies that women found helpful in coping with their abuse and those interventions that helped or hindered their attempts to leave. In this way it broadened the agenda for Justice Canada by considering other factors that affect abused women.

ORWAS provides an example of how the government can conduct research differently. By initiating such a collaborative process, Justice Canada has shown that government wants to hear the voices of those who are most affected by a particular issue. By providing communities with a direct link into the federal policy process, it is an indication that the federal government wants to work with communities to find solutions that will work at the local level. Justice Canada has found a way to conduct research that will be meaningful for the entire province of Ontario while working collaboratively with six individual communities. The process acknowledged community differences and discovered similarities, while empowering community members and identifying directions for action.

2.5 Steps to Promote Community Action

What future steps toward community change might result from *ORWAS*? A framework for understanding how community action could result from a community-based research project is provided by Horvath (1999). Horvath outlines research and theory on the organisation of social action. The framework identifies three levels at which empowerment can occur: the individual, group and community levels. In general, empowerment at all three levels is necessary for effective social action.

Individual empowerment has to do with the "*potential* for social power" (Horvath, 1999, 226). Individuals who are empowered feel that they have the information, abilities, and competence to participate in social action. That social action, however, will only happen if the conditions at the group and community levels permit.

The *ORWAS* study has already been successful at creating and supporting the *potential* for social power among the community researchers. They describe feeling more knowledgeable, more skilled and more confident about their ability to address woman abuse issues. Thus, empowerment of the community researchers at the individual level was a result of *ORWAS*.

According to Horvath's model, in order for individual empowerment to lead to social action, empowerment at the group level also has to occur. The support of groups and communities can transform an individual's potential for social power into actual social

action. Group empowerment has to do with the "*acquisition* of social power" (Horvath, 1999, 226) through co-ordination, leadership and planning.

In some of the six communities, group action has already begun. Those changes are occurring in places where the community researcher is attached to a community-based organisation that has the mission, the position, and the resources to support change. The *ORWAS* study provided a springboard for them to contribute to a group-level planning process and a community-level alliance. For researchers who were not affiliated with such an organisation, the challenge of community action is greater because there is no existing mechanism for acquiring social power through group efforts or community-level coalitions. The next steps in these communities will need to involve efforts at the group level.

The individual survivors in a community are a potential group with energy and commitment to the issue. The survivors interviewed for this follow-up study have ideas about what changes would be desirable and what would help them and other women like them. But the individual survivors have little connection with local groups that have similar interests. More opportunity for the individual women to connect with each other, or to connect with existing community groups, would be the next step in moving women from individual empowerment to group and community level action.

Community-level empowerment has to do with the "*exercise* of social power" (Horvath, 1999, 226) through forming alliances and building links between groups. Community empowerment is based on access to resources and information, and requires co-operation between groups based on common goals.

Community ownership is not achieved quickly or easily. Social change requires a long-term view and persistent effort. The building of individual skills within communities is an important first step toward the goal of community-based social change. However, it is important to realise that it must not stop there. In order for change to occur, supports of many kinds will be needed. Community researchers can be an important link to community change through research, but they must not be left feeling that the responsibility is theirs alone to continue the process.

As Horvath's model shows, a link to local organisations and community groups is the direction a community-based research project must go in order to continue a change process. Researchers would not presume to direct the specific nature of the changes; community members themselves would determine local needs. Assistance in the form of information, human and financial resources can facilitate collaboration between community groups to achieve the *exercise* of social power toward the prevention of woman abuse.

Non-collaborative forms of research are unlikely to make even preliminary steps toward empowerment for social action. In contrast, the Research as Empowerment methodology can set the stage for empowerment at the individual, group and community levels. With

the necessary supports, community change is a potential outcome of a community-based research approach.

3.0 INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS

The following presentation of interview material is based on the analysis of telephone interviews with 21 survivors who participated in the *ORWAS* project. The questions posed during the interview were organised around the three project objectives and the quotations and commentary are presented below under those objectives.

3.1 Research Process

Interview Format and Use of Community Researchers

The employment of a researcher from the community drew a mixed reaction from the survivors. Some did not know the researcher before and reported being concerned about who it might be.

> *"Because it was a small community. I wasn't sure who would be doing it. I didn't want it to be someone who was related."*

For those who did know the researcher, it was seen as a positive factor, in that they found it easier to decide to participate because they knew her or her family.

> *"Very comfortable because I know her mother and her sister."*

> *"It was easier because I had known her before."*

Women reported being comfortable in the interview format and liked talking to someone face to face. Initially, some worried about confidentiality or talking to a stranger but those fears seem to have dissipated once the interview began.

> *"She made me feel like she was a long lost friend. I was surprised how much I told her."*

Women stated that they felt they could trust the interviewer. Although some women said it was important to them to know that the interviewer had experience in the field of violence against women (which some researchers had), all the participants stated that they found the researchers very sympathetic and easy to talk to. Most said there was nothing that they felt they couldn't say to her.

> *"I think it might have been a little bit more challenging if it had been just somebody out of the blue and I didn't know them or that they'd been working in the field of violence against women."*

The majority were interviewed in their own homes and found that comfortable. Taping of the interview sessions did not seem to present any significant problems to the survivors.

> *"I preferred it. It was on my turf, my ground. It made it much easier that it was in my home."*

Transcripts and Reports

Not many of the women chose to change their transcripts but several said that they were glad to have had that option.

> *"Yes, it was nice to add to and explain things."*

> *"I crossed things out, added things, changed it around to make it make sense."*

Women were asked to comment on the format of the community report, which used direct quotes from the women who participated. The vast majority found it effective in accurately reflecting the perspectives of abused women.

> *"It puts the person right there. It gives a better picture of what each woman is going through."*

Meeting other Participants

As an optional part of the study design, a few of the community researchers offered women the chance to meet as a group to review the draft community report. Those who took the opportunity said that they liked being able to do so.

> *"You get a group of abused women in a room and they have so much in common that you can't shut them up. It's like all of the things that you didn't say for so many years all of a sudden come out all at once."*

3.2 Effects of Participating

Reasons for Participating

Women's reasons for choosing to participate in the study fell into three categories.

- To help other women.

> *"After 49 years of abuse I wanted to use my life to help someone else."*

> *"If it in any way could help anybody else in the future, then it would have made it a little more worth going through."*

- For their own personal growth or healing.

  "Thought it would be a great way to put some closure on what happened to me."

  "If I could talk about what I went through it might be good for me."

- Because they believe that other people should know what abused women go through.

  "Nobody knows how we feel because nobody asks us how we feel."

  "I want to be heard. I want my story told."

Concerns Prior to Participating

Most women did not have difficulty making the decision to participate. Those who did expressed the following concerns:

- Fear of being found out by their abuser.

  "I was afraid that he was going to find out. He still doesn't believe that he was mean to me."

- Denial that they had been living with abuse.

  "I guess I was sort of still in denial that it was abusive."

- Reluctance to relive their experiences.

  "When you talk about it, it stays with you after. Just reliving a lot of stuff."

- Confidentiality was identified by many of the women as a concern when they were deciding whether to participate. Two of the community researchers were associated in some way with the local shelters. For some of the women in these two communities, the shelter link allayed their fears.

  "Knowing that she had worked with abused women over a period of years, so I felt that there was no threat in terms of confidentiality."

  "I trusted the shelter that it wouldn't be anything that was used against me."

Effects of the Interview

Many women reported having mixed emotions while telling their stories and in the period after the interview.

"Because I had shared my experience to help other people, so I felt good about it. It just brought back memories and things that I hadn't talked about for a while."

"You can look at it as both positive and negative. Negative because the feelings are brought back to the surface. Positive because it was therapeutic."

Some women found that recalling their experiences of abuse brought up a range of emotions, including anger, sadness, guilt, bitterness and fear. Most of these negative emotions were a result of memories that came up after the interview and some women reported that they lasted for days or in a few cases, weeks.

"After the interview, a feeling of fear came back. All alone in this house. Almost brought me back to day one when you're initially afraid and don't know where they are, what they're doing, are they going to come and break the door down in the middle of the night."

Women also reported that they had a new sense of their own strength when they told their stories and a realisation that they had come a long way since then.

"It helped me to bring out my inner strength."

"You look at that but also look at how far you've come and you have a lot to be proud of."

Several women found that doing the interview gave them new insight into themselves and their relationships.

"Later on, afterwards, all these things were coming back – that I didn't realise I was being abused."

"I had a really profound awareness that I was again in an abusive relationship with my youngest son."

Two-thirds of the women reported no negative physical effects during or after the interview. Of the third who did, they reported experiencing headaches or sleeplessness, again as a result of the memories that came back after the interview. One woman wondered if her unexplained bouts of nausea during the night could be a result of the bad memories that had been flooding her mind.

Effects of Reading the Transcript

Many of the women survivors said that they found it more difficult emotionally to read the transcript of their interview than they did to tell their story to the interviewer.

"It kind of hit me and bothered me a bit that night. I thought I don't really want to be looking at this. It just reminded me of what I went through."

"It took twenty-three years for everything to happen. And then you're reading it and it took less than an hour to read it. You're reading a whole life in an hour, all of the abuse, the violence, the worry, the pain that you went through is all wrapped up in a one hour story. It really hit home."

"You get filled with the shame again because you can't believe that you lived that life."

Some were surprised to discover they had said as much as they had.

"It felt really weird that I had said all those things to a complete stranger. Never did that before. I kept everything inside. I have been seeing a counsellor for two years and she hasn't heard half of what I told the researcher that night."

Other women found that the transcript served as a reality check to remind them of what they had lived through.

"Seeing it written down makes it reality. It kind of scared me that I allowed myself to be put through that."

"I was sitting there and I thought it really does sound quite bad, when you read what happened to you."

Several of the survivors said that they had to wait for the right time when they felt they were ready to read the transcript.

"I didn't read it for about two weeks. It sat there and I would think about it. All those feelings of fear came up again."

Many of the women said that seeing their history laid out in sequence was a positive experience. Many said it made them feel proud.

"It did touch me to know that I was able to deal with it at that point in time and get in control of my life and go on with my life."

"I felt proud of myself. I laughed at some of the things I said. Felt good about it."

Effects of Reading the Community Report

Reaction to the community report was overwhelmingly positive. The most common reaction for the women was relief to discover that they were not the only abused woman in their community. Reading about other women's experiences helped to reduce their sense of isolation.

> *"I realised that there's a lot of other people like me out there."*

> *"I knew I was not the only one. There are others who have been through this."*

Many of the survivors found that the report offered them an opportunity to compare their experiences with those of other women. They noted that there were many similarities in their experiences, but also some were shocked to discover that others had lived through what they considered to be worse experiences.

> *"I felt like the majority of those stories were mine."*

> *"I couldn't believe that people were actually treated worse than I was."*

Some of the survivors expressed outrage when they realised that there are so many abused women.

> *"I was outraged. How many people out there have no access to help?"*

> *"Shocked that it happens out there as much as it does. It was an eye-opener."*

Benefits of Participating

There was consensus among the women that their participation in the study was a positive experience and all said that they would not hesitate to do it again if asked. Some of the benefits they identified were similar to their reasons for participating; other benefits were identified only after they reflected back on the study. The benefits included:

- A sense that their experience has not been wasted.

> *"The opportunity to know that even though it was a traumatic period in my life, I can take my experience and take what was negative into something positive. It compensates in some way."*

- The opportunity to help other women.

> *"Hopefully if it helps one other abused woman out there stand up for herself, then it's positive."*

- The knowledge that someone cared about their story and listened to them.

"To know that somebody actually cares enough to do this kind of a study and hopefully some good can come out of it."

- The knowledge that they are not alone.

"I felt I wasn't alone. That was the best part."

"They had asked for ten girls to participate and I had thought, 'Gee, maybe I'll be the only one.' And there were ten! So if there's ten, there must be twenty!"

- The healing that comes with telling their story.

"Whenever you share your experience it's of benefit to you because you grow from it, you can reaffirm your strength."

"It lightened my load of feeling ashamed."

Personal Change

When asked about personal change or growth as a result of their participation, survivors identified the following:

"It made me stronger."

"I'm freer now because I don't have to carry this inside any more. I can bring it out in the open and it's not going to hurt me any more."

"It's good for the self esteem. I have a lot more qualities than I thought. I'm articulate, I'm strong, I've made some really good choices for myself. Reinforces that I'm a good person."

"I came to the realisation that it wasn't something I wanted or needed to dwell on any more."

"I got strong and I'm willing to fight for the rights of abused women."

Difficult Aspects of Participating

The hardest thing about participating in the study for one of the women was "just picking up the phone." Other women found difficulty with other aspects of the research.

"I didn't like rereading the transcript."

"Overcoming the feeling that I'm exposing myself again."

"I really realised how abused I really was and how rough it must have been for the kids too."

"Revealing that my husband wasn't an angel. That he wasn't as faultless as everybody thought he was."

"Rehashing some of those awful events."

"Keeping the kids out of my hair."

"Wondering what I was going to say. If I was going to say the right thing."

Greater Involvement

When asked whether they would have liked a greater level of involvement with *ORWAS*, such as being involved in determining the interview questions or finding themes in the transcripts, most of the women said no. Their reasons included not enough time and not enough expertise.

"I really don't feel I have the education. My decisions wouldn't be as good as someone with more education."

Interestingly, when women were asked if they would like to be more involved with a future similar study, many of them said that they would.

"It was kind of new to me and I'd never done anything like that before, but now that I've done it I think I'd like to be involved."

3.3 Benefits of a Collaborative Partnership

Reflections on the Future of *ORWAS*

Talking about the study coming to an end brought up some strong feelings for the women with regard to the outcome. At the same time as they expressed hope that there would be change as a result of the study, women were somewhat cynical about their expectations.

"And it's like, 'Hey we've done all this work to try to maybe change something or bring about a review of some sort of justice legislation', and if there's no action taken or no intent for the government to do something, then it's sort of like, 'Wait a minute, is this all going to fall on deaf ears?' It's certainly a bit of frustration."

"I hope that it isn't coming to an end as such. I hope now that the work of gathering the information has come to an end but the study and its findings are just at their beginning. I hope the study lives a long time and goes a lot of places."

"Well, I feel kind of let down. Like, I feel that it should go further."

"What I want to see is the end report. I know this has to come to an end, and that's OK, but I just want the end report to have some meaning in it. If that end report comes out and it's just the same as it was before, that's going to be pretty damn frustrating. There's got to be something coming out of this, for all of us women, because I hope to hell we didn't go through this shit for nothing. So I'm excited."

Interviewer: *"What do you think will be done with the final report?"*
Respondent: *"Not much."*
Interviewer: *"How do you feel about that?"*
Respondent: *"Pissed off."*
Interviewer: *"Did you expect something different when you started this?"*
Respondent: *"No."*
Interviewer: *"And yet you chose to participate?"*
Respondent: "*Yes, just in case. I put my make-up on every day just in case* [laughs]."

Responsibility for Change

When asked who should take responsibility for implementing change at the community level post-*ORWAS*, most women did not see it as something for which they had any personal responsibility. If they had an idea at all, they saw that the responsibility lay elsewhere. The most common response to "what should happen now?" was uncertainty.

"It depends on what you guys do with this study. Will you do anything with it?"

"I don't know. Whoever is doing the study owns it and they need to decide where it will go."

"When [community researcher] came with these [community reports] I was wrong, I thought she had an answer from Ottawa. Well, I was wrong, we're not there yet. Oh my god it takes so long. So I'm excited waiting for the outcome."

A few of the survivors saw themselves as having some role to play in effecting change.

> *"All of us. We all have to work together. It can't be just [community researcher], can't be just the shelter. The women who lived the abuse have got to start taking part in this. Secrecy is such a big issue in abusive relationships. So if the women going through it don't talk, how are we going to know?"*

One woman said that although she would like to become more active on the issue, it would be difficult for her to take a public stand in her community.

> *"It's like coming out if I do because many relatives of my ex-spouse live in this town."*

4.0 INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

The following presentation of interview material is based on the analysis of a group interview by conference call with four community researchers and of individual interviews with each of these community researchers. The questions in the interview were organised around the three project objectives and the quotations and commentary are presented under those objectives.

4.1 Research Process

Training and Meetings

One of the highlights for the community researchers was the group interaction.

> *"The relationship during the meetings was great, they're a fantastic group of women."*

Practice interviews with women volunteers from a second-stage housing project were conducted in Ottawa during one of the training sessions. These practice interviews with women survivors of violent relationships were found to be helpful in building confidence in their interview skills.

> *"And that was really helpful because it gave us a chance to interview, they told us their stories and then they gave us a critique about how we interviewed, how they felt and how it could have been done more effectively, so that was really important, I think."*

The community researchers expressed frustration that there never seemed to be enough time when they were together for training sessions and meetings. On the one hand, they described the training sessions as "excellent", but also used such words as "gruelling", "exhausting", "draining and difficult" and "frustrating at times."

> *"It was like, 'Okay guys, we've got two and a half days, let's just do it,' whereas if we had more time to talk about things it would have ... made me more relaxed anyway."*

> *"It wouldn't have been an issue for me if we'd had more time to work together as a group. But I always had that pressured feeling."*

One researcher spoke of how she would have liked to know what was ahead but that "they didn't either", referring to the Department of Justice Canada researchers. The lack of structure made some of the community researchers uncomfortable.

"A lot of unknown. The training was excellent. Always a good agenda and handouts. You knew what you were doing at each meeting, but not at the next meeting until you got there."

Interviews and Focus Groups

In general, the community researchers found the interviews to be an effective method of gathering the information. Some thought the interviews were definitely "the best part" of the work.

"Doing the interviews didn't really feel like work. It felt like, you feel like you're a friend going over for coffee."

"It was exciting work, especially the interviews."

Although it seems that she had no difficulty getting into the story with the survivors, one researcher said that the interview experience was "never easy" and that she found it "scary". Another spoke of a feeling of "helplessness".

"Sort of at a loss sometimes because I wasn't there as a counsellor and sometimes it seemed like they needed someone to talk to in a counselling session."

Many of the researchers found the focus groups a challenge to organise.

"That was sheer hell! Initially when we talked about it I thought it was a great idea but when I started to organise them I found that nobody wanted to come. Nobody."

"There were people in the community that really didn't want to participate."

"Tense to get going. Who to bring together."

In spite of some reluctance to participate, when a focus group came together, the researchers found that it went relatively smoothly and the members participated fully.

"They really did work."

"That was great. I enjoyed that ... I couldn't shut them up."

"They went well. The people that did come were willing to talk."

Analysis

The data analysis was done as a group during a two-and a half day session in Ottawa. Prior to arriving, the community researchers were to have categorised their transcript data according to the topics in the research framework, using any method they chose. Once in Ottawa, an exercise using "sticky notes" was utilised to identify themes and develop the framework for the community reports. This necessitated each researcher going through her transcripts and writing on individual post-it notes the significant quotes for each theme that arose from the interviews. The analysis proved to be a bigger task than anticipated and researchers' reactions to this exercise varied.

> *"I was really scared ... It was so mind boggling and vague and huge."*

> *"So it was scary to be confronted with all this paper."*

> *"I had no idea how to pull out facts for the reports, had a really hard time with that."*

Some found the results of the sticky note exercise very satisfying.

> *"Stickies were phenomenal."*

> *"Amazed at how they could pull information out of a few sheets of paper."*

Report Writing

Each community researcher was responsible for writing the report of the findings from her own community (although a Justice Canada researcher wrote the community report in one case in which the community researcher could not continue). The Justice Canada researchers developed a common framework for these reports based on the results of the theme analysis in Ottawa. Researchers were encouraged to follow the framework and to use direct quotations from the survivors' transcripts.

The writing of the community reports was a stressful experience for most of the researchers. This was due in part to the fact that the original target date for completion was delayed and researchers found themselves writing the report when they were otherwise very busy, and in part because they had no model to follow. The common framework provided headings only and left many decisions about style to the individual researcher.

> *"My fear was, was I doing it the right way? The way they wanted it?"*

"I wasn't sure if I was doing the right thing."

"I felt perfectly capable of doing it, but I didn't know if I was doing it in the right sort of way. And nobody seemed to know."

There was consensus among the researchers that there was too little direction given in how to write the community report.

"That would have helped to take a bit of the pressure off to talk just a little bit about what type of structure we would use and the styles we would use in writing it up. That's an area I think we overlooked."

A couple of the researchers had to take time away from their jobs to accomplish the writing.

"I worked 4 very long days, 5 am to midnight."

"The report had to be written at a very busy time in my life, so it was very busy and I've never seen a summer pass so fast. It was emotional and tiring and draining."

The CAPRO Conference

The Department of Justice Canada researchers and the community researchers presented the community reports at a conference sponsored by CAPRO in December 1998. The conference focused on a number of rural, women's, and community development issues, in keeping with CAPRO's mandate to address rural woman abuse through community-based action. Police officers, service providers, policy analysts and many other interested parties attended the conference. The findings of the *ORWAS* project, as one of the projects that CAPRO was involved, were presented at one of the sessions. Although not all of the researchers were able to attend the conference and some for only a portion of the time, it was generally considered to be a valuable opportunity to bring some closure to the project.

"Being part of the group at the conference was neat. Closure for us."

"I was able to be there for the whole thing. Very valuable to be there."

Assessment of Method

The community researchers agreed that they would recommend more planning. Although there was acknowledgement that such a project requires a non-structured environment to some degree, frustrations were expressed about the need to be more focused in order to make the best use of limited time and resources. Researchers felt that this lack of structure was a reflection of the fact that they were, to some extent, "breaking the trail".

"Because it was from scratch we went in a lot of directions at times."

"Maybe it will be simpler for the next group that comes along."

When asked to evaluate the use of community-based methodology for such a research project, the researchers were generally supportive. Two of them made the point that the topic of the research should determine if a community-based methodology is the most appropriate method.

"It was for this topic because it is intimate."

"Anything where you're trying to evaluate human experience ... I don't think you could get truer results than you could in this type of research."

"There were so many layers and layers of information that came out through this process that we would never, ever have come upon if we had done it in a traditional kind of way."

Other merits of the community-based approach that the researchers identified focused on its applicability in rural areas.

"It's hard to understand the dynamics of rural Ontario, you have to be brought up or live in that kind of environment."

"To have people who actually are rural contribute their input really kept that kind of focus on the project from beginning to end."

"... and the unique opportunity it provided for community people to be involved in research."

"It's a great opportunity for local people to find something interesting to work at that they wouldn't normally have the opportunity to do otherwise."

Two of the researchers talked about another distinct advantage that community-based research offers to the community in terms of fostering change.

"You give ownership to the community ... It's therefore their responsibility to continue, carry through with the project, find some of the solutions, put them into practice. I think it's excellent."

"Keep the skills in the community. Because of that I'm able to take the data through the violence council and through victims services and try to implement changes."

The involvement of a researcher who knows the area well and is known was also seen as beneficial.

"I think there was definitely local-speak with all of the women. To what degree that influenced how comfortable they were with me, I don't know. I don't think it hurts to be a community person."

"They know me. I am an active member of their community, I have my face in the newspaper, and they know that if they had to that they could get a hold of me."

Value of a Participatory Approach[1]

Community researchers strongly believed that it was important for them to be involved in every aspect of the project and that there were definite advantages that accrued from the participatory approach. Some of the advantages they identified were as follows:

"We were all really, really committed to the process ... which makes you that much more sensitive to the people that you are interviewing."

"It gave it a power, I think, that you couldn't have had if someone, a third party, would go through those transcripts and pull out different issues."

"It made us accountable to each other in some ways. We saw ourselves as a community."

"I don't think anyone else could have written the report ... It's a sensitive topic, it has to have that kind of sensitivity and emotion to it to really do justice to what the women told us."

"I think that's the key for this whole project, such a collective process."

"They [Justice Canada researchers] had the belief ... that we all had something to contribute, some knowledge or expertise in our area, and

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[1] "Participatory approach" is defined here in terms of the involvement of the community researchers in all aspects of the research. This is distinct from the meaning of participatory that might be used in methodologies like Participatory Action Research, in which participatory would mean grass-roots involvement of survivors.

that that could be useful. They believed that we were all capable of doing this. That was a huge help for me."

The Role of Compensation

Initially, the community researchers were offered an honorarium of $1000 for their work on the *ORWAS* project and all out-of-pocket expenses covered. It seems clear that money played little part in the community researchers' decisions to participate in the project.

"I work for a lousy salary, so it's the process, the project, the issue."

"And I was really excited to be doing research so money was not a motivator."

As the project became more involved than originally anticipated, community researchers were relieved to learn that the honorarium would be increased to $3000.

"Which was nice because when I found out how much work it was, I don't think $1000 would have covered it."

"Thank goodness they managed to push that up a little as the project grew."

When asked if the compensation was adequate, the community researchers' responses indicated that there was some conflict in their minds concerning this question. It is interesting to note that the issue was never discussed in the group.

"The honorarium validated that what we were doing was important."

"By the end I didn't think so. 'Cause I was so tired. But looking back on it, for me it was."

"That sort of ran through my mind after we got into it and after the ball started rolling. I thought, 'Well, gee, here I have this flipping degree. What did I work for, so I could do free research, basically?"

"I would still have done it if I wouldn't have been paid."

Some of the community researchers questioned the reasons for paying only an honorarium to community members. However, it must be noted that even those who voiced criticisms did not regret their participation.

"Is it ethical to do it that way? Probably not. You know, just because you're doing work with community members does that automatically devalue what they're worth?"

"They managed to save themselves quite a bit of money by doing it this way. That's another benefit, if they put it towards the [National] debt."

The community researchers recognised that funding is almost always a problem for research projects, and acknowledged that they received in-kind supports and valuable research experience in lieu of increased compensation. When considering how the project would have been different if there had been more financial compensation for their work, the community researchers voiced doubts about their participation and about the fate of the project.

"The project would never have panned out to anything if real world salaries were paid. And that's too bad."

"I would have said, 'Oh my god, do I have the skills? Am I worthy of $20,000?'. And frankly, they probably would never have hired me, not having any experience."

"I would have been much more intimidated by the project, that's for sure."

"And maybe that's what contributed to getting a group of people together that were so enthusiastic because they weren't doing it for the money."

4.2 Effects of Participating

Reasons for Participating

Although all the community researchers were interested in the topic of rural woman abuse, that was not what prompted them to participate in *ORWAS*. Their personal circumstances at the time of the study provided the motivation for most of them to get involved. The reasons they gave fell into one of three categories:

- It offered them an opportunity to learn more about research.

"I needed a research project for my degree."

- It provided additional experience to add to their résumé.

"I thought the incentive would be the experience, an addition to my résumé, and doing something for the issue."

- It came at a time when they were unemployed or under-employed.

"I had been at home, no job, trying to build up a background in something."

Expectations

It is clear that none of the researchers knew what to expect at the outset of the project. Most knew only that it involved some kind of research on violence against women.

"I really wasn't sure what I had said yes to."

"I really had no idea, in fact I didn't know until the first meeting, as to what I was really getting into."

This uncertainty created some concerns among the researchers in the early stages of the project.

"I had such different expectations, it kind of caught me off guard, so I really felt in the first day or two of that meeting that we were all over the place, not focusing."

"Not so much misgivings as concern that I really didn't know what was expected of me. Was I going to be able to live up to [Justice Canada Researchers'] expectations, that was my fear at that point."

Emotional Toll of the Interviews

One of the community researchers said that even though she works with abused women regularly, " I was not prepared for the emotional effects on me." In asking herself why she was so affected by the work, she postulated that it could be related to the importance of the study and "the impact the overall study would have."

Researchers described the emotions they experienced after doing the interviews in the following terms:

- Helplessness.
- Furious.
- Confusion, frustration that there was nothing more I could do.
- I came out shaking.
- It made me cry.
- It affects me every day.

The researchers were impressed by the strength of the survivors.

> *"They agreed, they gathered the strength and courage to do it [participate]. That had an overwhelming effect on me."*

Emotional Toll of the Transcripts

One researcher described the period of receiving and reading over the transcripts as "intense". Others said that they were not prepared for the intensity of the emotions that they experienced. In comparing the reading of the transcripts to hearing the women's stories for the first time in the interview, one community researcher described it this way:

> *"You could have let it go when you heard it the first time, but now you've been poking at it like a scab covering a sore. Now it's starting to bleed because you've been going over it so much."*

The researchers described their reactions to reading the transcripts in the following ways:

- Exhausting.
- Irritated.
- Really drained.
- Cranky.
- Carrying that anger.
- Miserable.

Researchers spoke of "carrying [the women's] stories" and being able to hear the women's voices again as they read the transcripts. The cumulative effect of the stories was "like bringing all of those women into one room." Although generally they said they enjoyed doing the interviews, they found that reading the transcripts was surprisingly difficult.

> *"Going through the transcripts was just a burden, it was a burden, a very heavy feeling."*

Several researchers suggested that they could have been better prepared for the emotional impact of the work.

> *"We could have had a little more information on vicarious trauma."*

Benefits of Participating

The researchers all stated that it was a valuable experience that they would repeat if circumstances would allow. The following benefits were identified:

- Research experience.

> *"For one thing, doing research like that, community-based qualitative research. It was amazing to be part of that."*

> *"I may have had less pay but I got experience, which was a pay on its own too."*

- An increased awareness about the issue of abuse.

> *"I've become very awakened to abuse and violence."*

> *"I've never really done any work in abuse, so this was a real eye-opener."*

> *"I'm aware of who doesn't have a voice, who has been silenced."*

- Increased activism.

> *"I love it when people say it's not a problem because I have the data stored in my brain and I can say, 'Oh yeah, it's a problem.'"*

- An opportunity to experience something unique.

> *"ORWAS was a big machine. I lived it for six months. Not only with the material but the people, the women, the voices. It was very far-reaching. I don't think it will ever be finished in our minds."*

> *"It was an incredible opportunity. There was a massive learning curve; it never hurts to learn. It was extremely interesting, the whole process."*

- The chance to meet the survivors.

> *"The women have given me courage."*

> *"Meeting those incredible women that I talked to ... I would never have had the chance to talk to them if it hadn't been through this study."*

- The bonding that took place within the group of researchers.

> *"The best part was our group meetings, usually at dinnertime."*

"It was good fun, and I think that it affected our work, the fact that it was good fun."

- The opportunity to present the findings and feel as though it made an impact.

"Information I was able to glean that helped someone else."

"It was like we've gotten through to somebody. It had that kind of impact."

- Increased self-esteem.

"It really elevated my self-esteem. The person I am today is not the person I was a year ago. It's incredible."

Challenges Associated with Participating

Lack of time was the most commonly cited challenge that arose during the course of the project. Community researchers were not aware at the outset of the time commitment they were making.

"Time was certainly our biggest enemy throughout the whole thing."

"Quite a lengthy process. I was used to a smaller scale that gets done quicker."

"It dragged on. When we first started I thought it would be maybe a two to three month project. I did not anticipate it going on for a year and a half."

Because the project stretched out over a considerably longer period of time than initially envisioned, the community researchers found that their circumstances changed. All of the researchers were faced with choices between *ORWAS* and their other commitments, and one researcher had to leave the project before the end.

"I was wishing it would end."

"I had to take some time off work and do my calls at night."

"For me it ended differently than I thought it was going, than I expected because I couldn't make it to one of the meetings after all the transcribing was done ... because of a work conflict ... so it ended more abruptly than I thought it was going to, or hoped it was going to, basically."

It is interesting to note that, in spite of the pressure, none of the researchers wanted to quit the project before it was over, including the one researcher who was unable to continue.

> *"Never a time when I thought of giving it up. Probably a time when I think I wished I hadn't taken it."*

> *"I didn't want to walk out without knowing how it would end."*

Another aspect of the time issue that was identified by one researcher was the difficulty she had in scheduling interviews.

> *"Just doing the scheduling of interviews and focus groups. I found that took up a lot of time. Finding the women to interview."*

One researcher expressed concerns about the effect the extended time frame had on the participants as well as on the community researchers.

> *"For those who were very eager to see the final copy, it was an exercise in patience."*

4.3 Benefits of a Collaborative Partnership

Impact at the Local Level

Two of the community researchers were optimistic that *ORWAS* would result in some positive change at the community level. One researcher had already seen evidence of change in her own community, while another was anticipating that some changes would happen in her town. It is interesting to note that these two researchers are the two who are employed in anti-violence agencies in their community.

> *"I know locally what we are doing is taking information and making changes here."*

> *"It has stirred up a lot of activity anyway in a sense ... Because of the project it's gotten other people involved in the issue in this area."*

Another of the researchers did not expect to see change in her own community.

> *"Didn't gain a whole lot of ground. I think they've seen so many studies come and go that, it's not to say that they totally discredit it, but they don't find it worthy of their time because they don't think that it's going to make any change."*

The hope was expressed that CAPRO would take the lead in facilitating change at the local level.

> *"But I really see ... CAPRO taking the information and running with it and doing something concrete with it that will lead to good consequences, concrete results."*

> *"Maybe CAPRO could look at that if nobody else takes the initiative."*

Impact at the Government Level

There was much less optimism among the community researchers concerning the possibility of change occurring at the provincial or national government level as a result of *ORWAS*. One researcher expressed the opinion that it was important for the Department of Justice Canada to have been the vehicle for this project because "it gives good exposure to this type of research", but "I can't really see them doing incredible things with it." Another researcher expressed similar cynicism: "You hear of so many things that government does that don't come to anything."

It seems that the community researchers generally felt that it was up to the communities to take the responsibility for making change happen.

> *"If all communities would talk, have meetings, handouts ..."*

> *"But at least we who participated will have taken what we learned and walked away and tried to do something. So it wasn't for nothing. I will never feel that way."*

Impact on the Participants

Two of the community researchers expressed a sense of pride in having made a valuable contribution to the issue of violence against women.

> *"To know that because of the project it's stirred up the fire a bit and in some way I have just a little bit to do with it. That's good."*

> *"I got such a gratifying feeling from doing that because I spoke to people who were in the audience [at the CAPRO conference], and they were so impressed with the information that had been gathered, with the work that had been done, they felt it was such an important part of the conference."*

When asked to assess what changes participation in the *ORWAS* project would bring for the survivors, the community researchers saw some very positive effects.

> *"She said, 'I've never been the same.' And I thought, 'Is she going to say I wish I hadn't done it?' and she said, 'I wish I had done it, I wish I had*

had the opportunity. I wish somebody had asked me about this forty years ago.'"

"She has told me how it has opened up her life."

"One said to me that her life has changed so much since the interview and she looked at all she had accomplished. Reclaimed her spirit."

"And I know from just speaking with her recently that she said, oh definitely, it had a very big impact on her."

"A couple who dealt with social services, some satisfaction that someone was listening to them, really listening to how they were treated."

On the other hand, researchers also reported that the survivors expressed doubt as to the value of the research.

"Some were hesitant to believe that the report could make a difference."

"A standard reaction was, 'What will be next? Will this change anything?'"

One researcher said she found it frustrating to not be able to guarantee the survivors that the study would yield positive results in terms of making a difference for other abused women.

"All the survivors were so keen on participating to make a difference, participating to help someone else ... And that was a question that was asked, 'What is it going to do?' I think that would have been the hardest, not being able to give them the [answer]."

5.0 INTERVIEWS WITH PROJECT LEADERS

The leadership of the *ORWAS* project came initially from two researchers at the Department of Justice Canada, Research and Statistics Division. The Community Abuse Program of Rural Ontario (CAPRO) became a partner in the project in its early stages. Health Canada provided financial support for the project. Interviews were conducted with the two Justice Canada researchers and the co-ordinator of CAPRO. To provide some degree of anonymity for the respondents, direct quotations are used to a limited extent in this section. Where necessary for purposes of clarity, the organisation has been identified. The questions in the interview were organised around the three project objectives, and the commentary and quotations are presented under those objectives.

5.1 Research Process

Key Factors in the Development of *ORWAS*

The *ORWAS* project developed as a number of threads came together. The Justice Canada researchers were given a directive to conduct research on violence against women in rural areas; they had an interest in doing participatory research; and they had personal experiences of living in rural and/or Northern areas and had an understanding of these areas. Justice Canada needed a connection with a community organisation, through which the Department could identify local people to train as community researchers. CAPRO had a need for documentation of rural violence as a lobbying tool, and also wished to further their goals of training community people to do community development work. So as Justice Canada and CAPRO came together, it was with a recognition that this project could potentially meet the aims of both groups.

The key factors that contributed to the development of the *ORWAS* project include:

- The research fit into an existing context within the organisation, and could play an identifiable role within that organisation. The project had an objective and a value beyond simply doing the research; it was part of a larger picture. For the Justice Canada researchers, a directive to conduct research on violence against women gave them the opportunity to design a process which allowed them to hear directly from the women most affected. For CAPRO, the community-based process dovetailed with their basic beliefs in community development and would provide the documentation on rural violence that they needed.

  > CAPRO: *"I have learned over the years that to lobby I need documentation."*

- The researchers had a desire to do qualitative research, guided by previous work in the area. There was a deep commitment to exploring a participatory, community-based, feminist process.

"The other thing that we came across in the literature is that here's a movement that is about women and the women are invisible."

- The leaders had a commitment to ethical, meaningful research. They wanted to do research differently than the traditional paradigm because they thought the benefits to the communities would be greater in a community-based approach.

  "The impulse for me to engage in this kind of methodology is that it hopefully exploits the respondents less and creates opportunities for the participants to continue whatever constructive process might happen along the way."

- The Justice Canada researchers had a personal connection to rural areas and brought with them an understanding of rural issues and an interest in exploring these issues in a way that would be acceptable in rural communities. Of course, CAPRO's mission is specifically concerned with abuse in rural areas, so the rural connection is built in to CAPRO's perspective on the project.

Funding

Securing funding for the project was a challenge that continued through the life of the project. The Justice Canada researchers continued to seek funding for the project as it evolved. Not having the money at the start of the project created uncertainty for both Justice Canada and CAPRO. For Justice Canada, this uncertainty had an impact on their project planning, while for CAPRO it caused some cash-flow problems.

CAPRO: *"I had to wait a long time to get reimbursed ... We have to recognise that with nonprofits when they are project-based, that there's a little more problem that way financially."*

Working with Community Researchers

The involvement of community-based researchers was a key feature of this approach. The community researchers did not necessarily have research skills, or extensive knowledge of woman abuse issues, but they did have a willingness to participate in a project of this nature in their communities. There were clear reasons that the leaders chose to work with community people rather than hiring professional researchers. Working with community people also raised challenges for the leaders.

- The community researchers brought knowledge of their communities that would not have been possible for an outsider to obtain.

- Challenges identified by the leaders were those of range of research experience, distance, transportation, general co-ordination of six locales, and security. Finding enough time when everybody could be together seemed to be the biggest challenge of all.

"The challenges were that they all came with different backgrounds and different degrees of ability to converse with us about research issues, research methods. Some of them had done quite a bit of research, others hadn't. There was also an age range. But that was the challenge. The challenges also enriched it because we got such a range of perspectives, informing the work and the methods. The other challenge was distance and co-ordination and communication."

- The community researchers, together with the project leaders, developed a strong bond and commitment to the project and to each other.

  "Everybody brought something to the group. It's that kind of stuff you can't impose ... It either happens or it doesn't."

- The honorarium paid to the community researchers was seen by the Justice Canada researchers as inadequate, given the amount of work that the researchers did. However, the community researchers began the project expecting only a small honorarium.

  Justice Canada: *"I certainly would have liked to have given them more than an honorarium, that's for sure, because I know how hard they worked."*

Method

The project leaders generally felt that the methods used in *ORWAS* were appropriate and had worked well, although more time for data analysis would have been useful.

- Interviews were considered to be the only appropriate way of collecting information in keeping with the goals of the project.

- Transcription of the interviews was done by staff at Justice Canada. This process was time consuming, and the sound quality was not always good enough for easy transcribing.

  "That would be a little tip. Making sure that your tapes are high quality."

- Data analysis was done using "sticky notes" to identify themes. This proved to be a lengthy process. Although the plan had been to involve the community researchers in analysis, lack of time meant that most of their time together was spent sorting the data into headings.

  "We barely got to where their insights and their analytical perspective could have been really helpful, because we just spent so much time sorting into headings. Under more ideal circumstances that work would have already been done before they would have arrived."

- Community focus groups were conducted by the community researchers with service providers and community members. The community focus groups were intended to provide an indication of the community perspective on woman abuse. This was an important part of the process for CAPRO, as an indication of "where the community was at", thus providing CAPRO with a starting point for work in the community. For the Justice Canada researchers, there was some initial uncertainty as to how the focus group process would fit with the interview process, and upon reflection, the suggestion was made that a different sequence might have been more useful.

  > Justice Canada: *"[Would have been better to] do the research with the women first as the owners of the experience and then using that for community education ... The focus group first of all had to satisfy themselves that it was a problem ... Had they had the result of what the women had to say, and then structured the discussion along that line, it would have been a better use of everybody's time."*

- Each community researcher wrote a community report based on the interviews and focus groups that she had conducted. These reports were intended to communicate results to the participants fairly quickly after the interviews. The Justice Canada researchers knew that finishing the synthesis report would be a lengthy process, and did not want the survivors to have to wait for that before they saw any result. The community reports, once read by the survivors, acted as a validity check for the analysis process. The community reports were also intended to be used to address the issue within each community, aiming to contribute to local ownership, action and advocacy.

  > *"So they could be used at the community level. So that there would be a product owned by the women who participated in the study ... and used in whatever way they wanted to use it."*

- Although it was not part of the method, the project could have extended the participatory approach by involving survivors in the research. Although they are open to the idea, and see the potential benefits of such involvement, the Justice Canada researchers are cautious about assuming that the survivors would be willing or interested in being more involved. They also recognise that it would be an enormous undertaking to involve survivors from multiple locations.

5.2 Effects of Participating

Emotional Effects

Although the project leaders did not conduct interviews themselves with survivors, they did read the transcripts and participate in the data analysis and report writing. The emotional effect of their exposure to the interview transcripts was similar to that of the

community researchers: they felt overwhelmed by the content of the interviews. They also found the experience to be meaningful in terms of leading to their own growth and personal reflection. One researcher described feeling shamed, because she saw that the survivors had so much trust in government, and yet she was aware of the difficulties there would be in creating change at the policy level.

> *"It was overwhelming at times, and then I think about the researchers, and I think how overwhelming it must have been for them at times. It's affirming in another way: the stories have to be told."*

5.3 Benefits of a Collaborative Partnership

Roles of CAPRO and the Department of Justice Canada

The Justice Canada researchers felt that they needed a connection to a community-based organisation so that there could be access to community-based researchers and to survivors of violence in those rural communities. This access was achieved through the relationship with CAPRO. Justice Canada was able to provide co-ordination for a multi-site project, expertise in research and training, project funding, and in-kind supports for the community researchers.

> Justice Canada: *"If I were to do it again, I would do it exactly the same way, with wanting to hook up with a community-based organisation that already had contacts in the community."*

There were some challenges in the relationship between Justice Canada and CAPRO. Issues of power were identified as central to the challenges. The project leaders were clear that in a government/community organisation partnership, there will inevitably be a power differential. The challenge is not to eliminate the differential, but to acknowledge it, and then take steps to create a level playing field where possible. All parties feel that working openly on power and role issues is necessary for an effective government/community partnership. They also acknowledge that the trust and comfort necessary for an open dialogue only comes with time, so these issues need to be monitored as the project progresses.

> *"I don't know how to address that [power differential] except to spell it out as clearly as possible at the outset and get senior level commitment to that as well."*

Impact on the Department of Justice Canada

The Justice Canada researchers felt that the research findings would have a positive impact in their department and other departments. At the time of writing, some findings had already been brought forward within departments. Despite the positive contribution made by the research, however, they felt that there would be some hesitation about the

qualitative, participatory methodology among researchers who were accustomed to quantitative approaches. They anticipated that there would be a need to present the research as a valid and rigorous piece of research, in order to counter some of the methodological criticisms.

Impact on CAPRO

CAPRO considers the *ORWAS* project as a tool in its community development work. Their position is that research can be used to determine and support future directions for action. Both CAPRO and Justice Canada agree that the research should be used to propel further action on the issue of rural woman abuse. They also appear to agree that Justice Canada is not the organisation that will be responsible for driving that action at the community level, but rather that CAPRO will play that role.

> CAPRO: *"Our research is always very action oriented and the research does not sit on a shelf. We use it to propel us to the next step."*

Impact on the Communities

One desired outcome of *ORWAS* was to contribute to community ownership. Community ownership is seen as a key part of encouraging community change in responses to violence against women.

> *"There is potential for actually creating opportunities for action on the ground through more participatory research process than you have in more conventional research approaches."*

> *"If there's more ownership and responsibility there will be more action."*

ORWAS was not a grassroots project that came from the communities. Therefore, there were challenges associated with it having an impact in the communities. All project leaders see that community-level change is desirable and worthy of support. However, the next steps toward community change, and the actual mechanisms of change, are still to be determined. The skilled researchers in the communities may be a resource for ongoing work on the issue, although the ways that they might be involved are uncertain. There is no specific plan for their continued involvement on the issue, but new projects may find ways to draw on their skills. The next step may be to involve community members in decisions about community action, an approach favoured by CAPRO.

> *"The information needs to go to them [the community] and then the next step is asking them what they think needs to be done."*

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section, the views of the survivors, community researchers, and project leaders are discussed under each objective of the study. The authors have used the data generated by this case study as a backdrop in analysing the benefits and the knowledge that may be gained from using a collaborative, community-based methodology. This discussion of findings is presented with accompanying recommendations for researchers who may be interested in using a similar methodology. Recommendations are grouped at the end of each section to accommodate the fact that many of the themes cut across some or all of the three groups.

6.1 Research Process

Survivors

Many of the women who chose to participate in *ORWAS* were motivated by the desire to make good use of a bad experience. While it is impossible to know why some women chose not to participate, for those who did, it seems that once they had made the decision to participate, they did not have any significant doubts about confidentiality or anonymity. The majority were interviewed in their homes and found that comfortable. Taping of the interview sessions did not seem to create any problems. It is not clear that the choice of a community researcher made the decision to participate any easier for the survivors. Although knowing the interviewer may have made them less nervous before the interview, even the women who did not know their interviewer said they found the experience to be comfortable and positive.

It seems that even more important than having a researcher who is a known member of the community, it was important for the survivors to have personal contact with a sensitive interviewer in a familiar setting. The open-ended interview format and the sensitivity of the community researchers allowed the survivors to tell their stories in an atmosphere of respect. This respect was further evidenced by the opportunity for the women to provide feedback on the transcripts and on the draft report. The transcripts yielded rich data, surprising even some of the survivors with the amount of information they felt comfortable sharing.

Many of the survivors indicated that they would have liked to meet the other participants. Although this was not a required part of the study design, two of the community researchers gave the women the option of meeting after the community report came out. For those survivors who took this opportunity, it was generally viewed as a valuable experience that further reduced their feelings of isolation in their community. Future similar research projects may want to include such a meeting as an option for the participants. It is interesting to note that when survivors were asked if they would have liked more involvement in this study, most said no. When asked if they would like to be more involved in a future similar study, most said yes. This would seem to suggest that their participation in this study sparked an interest in research and perhaps increased self-

confidence in their ability to make an important contribution in this field. This is an indication that, for most of the women, the research process was empowering.

Community Researchers

As the *ORWAS* project evolved, community researchers developed a strong bond with the project leaders and with each other. All the interviewees spoke very warmly of the other researchers and leaders, and expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to be part of such an enthusiastic and positive group of women. The bond among team members contributed to the success of the project by providing positive, shared experiences, even when the work was difficult and demanding. The high degree of commitment to the project speaks favourably of the effectiveness of the team building process. It is important to invest significant time and effort into team building.

The leadership of the Justice Canada researchers received high praise from the community researchers for the way each member's experience and insight was sought and utilised. The community researchers strongly believed that the participatory method made the project stronger, the findings more significant and the experience more memorable for all who participated. It was their opinion that the employment of community members as researchers resulted in the collection of data of greater quality and depth than would have been possible with researchers from outside the survivors' communities.

The project that the community researchers thought they were signing up for was clearly not the project that they ended up with. Initially, they believed that their involvement would be limited to doing interviews over a period of about three months. The fact that the project stretched out over a full year while they went on to assist with data analysis, writing the community reports and reporting publicly on their findings caught them by surprise and caused some difficulties for all of them.

Community researchers identified lack of time as the most serious obstacle encountered. Three specific difficulties with time were identified. The first difficulty concerns the lack of forewarning about the full extent of the commitment involved in such a project. *Project leaders* should attempt to be as clear as possible about the time commitment required at the outset of the project.

The second difficulty concerns the issue of deadlines, which seemed firm but ended up being changed frequently. While this flexibility was welcome and necessary in some respects, it did have the result of delaying the project, thus creating more conflict with other responsibilities for the community researchers.

One final difficulty with time concerns the frustration expressed by most of the team members about the training sessions and especially about the data analysis meeting. There was too little time for the amount of work that needed to be accomplished and team members said they often felt rushed. Future project leaders should be aware of the difficulties of trying to co-ordinate meetings with community researchers, and of not setting an overly ambitious agenda.

It may not be realistic to suggest *project leaders* build more time into the process. It may be that more planning and somewhat more rigid guidelines are necessary. There are advantages and disadvantages of an evolving process such as the *ORWAS* project. The employment of a research model that was meant to evolve throughout the process, the sense of 'making it up as they went along' left some of the community researchers worried that they were not doing it 'right'. On the other hand, that same dynamic process may have kept all members of the team interested and involved throughout in spite of the extended time.

What other factors may have motivated the researchers to get involved and to stay involved throughout the unexpectedly long process? As they indicated, most of them were in a period of low employment activity and were interested in research for various reasons. Clearly, money was not a motivating factor, but the research experience was seen as a form of compensation. In considering the question of monetary compensation, it is noteworthy that most of the community researchers did not see themselves as being worthy of being paid standard research rates yet were well able to do the work required of them. Some of them felt that the project would have been less effective if 'expert' researchers had been used, yet at the same time expressed questions about whether their contribution had been undervalued.

Project Leaders

Development of the method

The *ORWAS* project happened because there was a place for it to happen within Justice Canada, and because of the commitment of the leaders to do meaningful research in a qualitative, community-based way. For any future project, this kind of context and commitment will be necessary for success. The co-ordination, planning and execution of a research project of this type place great demands on everyone concerned, and cannot be undertaken lightly.

The Justice Canada researchers chose to work with community researchers in order to work within communities in a respectful way. The partnership with CAPRO had the result of successfully linking the community researchers to the project. Certainly the Justice Canada researchers identify that working with these women was the best part of the *ORWAS* project for them, and they feel that using community-based people to conduct the interviews was an advisable path to follow.

Funding

Because CAPRO was under a research contract to Justice Canada, CAPRO was expected to incur the costs of the researchers' travel and other expenses and then to invoice Justice Canada for those costs. This is a standard arrangement for federal departments when they administer research contracts. CAPRO, as a small, non-profit organisation, does not have deep pockets and struggled to front the money for these costs. Community organisations can bring a great deal to research projects, but they do not generally bring a lot of ready cash. In government/community partnerships, alternative contract arrangements should be made when government enters into agreement with community organisations.

Securing funds for the *ORWAS* project was an ongoing challenge. The approach taken by the Justice Canada researchers was to plan the research program, and then find funding for one step of the project at a time. Although this ultimately proved to be a successful approach, the lack of full, up-front funding may have proved to be an obstacle to complete, long-range planning. The community researchers did not know what they were committing to at the beginning; this is due in no small part to the uncertainty around funding. The project evolved as new money was found to support parts of the project; as the project evolved, so did the tasks of the community researchers.

Although the community researchers received an honorarium for their work, they were basically volunteers rather than paid staff. This meant that they became involved with the project because they wanted to, rather than for financial reasons. This may have contributed to the strong commitment made by the researchers to see the project through. Having a volunteer research team may, therefore, have been an asset to the project. However, using volunteers also meant that the Justice Canada researchers were not in a position to set deadlines, insist that community researchers attend meetings, or make other demands. Having a paid research team might have reduced the level of commitment the researchers brought to the project, but it would have allowed the team leaders more control over the process, and the project might have been completed in less time. If this had been a paid position, the community researchers would not have had to make choices between their paid work and the *ORWAS* project, as they sometimes had to do.

The Justice Canada researchers both feel that greater compensation for the community researchers would have been desirable and justified, although there were challenges in accessing even the amount of money that was available for the project. This struggle for adequate funding is typical of community research in general. To augment the limited financial compensation, the Justice Canada researchers provided many in-kind supports for the community researchers. They made every effort to accommodate other pressures in the community researchers' lives when scheduling the conference calls and meetings. The Department of Justice Canada provided all of the transcription of interview tapes and covered the costs of many lengthy conference calls to keep the research team in close contact. To assist the community researchers in writing the community reports, Justice Canada research staff subjected all interview data to analysis using the *QSR NUD*IST* program, producing voluminous charts of categorised quotations for the community researchers to use. Training sessions and team meetings, while perhaps overly ambitious in the amount of work to be accomplished, invariably made allowance for social time, good food, excellent accommodation and plenty of laughter.

As noted in the discussion of the community researchers' perspectives, there are mixed feelings about the honoraria. On one hand, the researchers were grateful to receive the money. On the other hand, some community researchers also questioned whether the use of community-based researchers was partly a way to conduct the research without having to pay researchers' wages. However, even the community researchers who were critical of the compensation stated that they benefited from the experience and received valuable non-monetary rewards through their participation.

The issue of honoraria was not a point of contention during the project. All participants seemed to recognise that there were real limitations to the money available and that, although more money would have been desirable, as a team they had to do the best they could with what they had. The experience of being a member of the team and the quality of the relationships formed were cited by all participants as intangible but lasting benefits of the project.

For government researchers seeking to implement community-based projects, there are issues surrounding payment that need to be addressed. Is there an advantage to having volunteers as opposed to hiring paid staff within the communities? The potential increase in commitment to the project among volunteers as opposed to paid staff may be a factor. If funding will not allow payment of researchers at market rates, what other ways can be found to show appreciation for their work?

Focus groups

The focus groups required additional work on the part of the community researchers; whether or not they were worth that extra work was a matter of some disagreement on the part of the project leaders. Because the process from the outset had been democratic, the strong feelings of the CAPRO co-ordinator that the focus groups should be included carried the day. As one Justice Canada researcher said, "That's part of collaborative research design."

Different definitions of "community" may be responsible for the different feelings about these focus groups. The Justice Canada researchers appear to have defined the community in terms of the community researchers and the survivors. By working with community-based researchers, the Justice Canada researchers felt that they had an entrée into the community, which could lead to further action. By gaining access to survivors in the communities, they heard from the critical informant group. They also hoped that the survivors and community researchers might be moved to pursue changes inspired by the research process because of feelings of ownership and empowerment. In contrast to the Justice Canada definition of "community", CAPRO appears to have defined the key aspects of community in terms of mainstream community members and community leaders. These groups were pursued for the community focus groups. It was hoped that these groups would set direction on next steps for community action.
No single definition of "community" is correct or incorrect, but the definitions have implications for decisions about method. As seen in *ORWAS*, the different definitions raise the following methodological questions: Is the priority to address the community at large, or the survivors within that community? Do community members most need to know about the views of other community members like them, or about the views of survivors? If "ownership" is a precursor to action, are survivors or community members most likely to take ownership of the problem of woman abuse? The purpose and importance of the focus groups rests on the answers to these questions.

Recommendations

- A collaborative process with community members can make a significant contribution to our understanding of violence against women in rural areas.

Researchers wishing to expand their understanding of this issue should consider using such a methodology.

- It is important to listen to the women's voices and respect their experiences. A sensitive interviewer and a familiar setting can facilitate this process.
- It is important to respect the community researchers' knowledge of their communities and to involve them in a meaningful way throughout the research process.
- Project leaders should attempt to be as clear as possible at the outset of the project about the time commitment required by community researchers.
- Questions about compensation for community researchers must be critically considered by project leaders. Careful thought should be given to other ways to compensate people for their time and efforts when funding is limited.
- It is important to invest significant time and effort into team building.
- Project leaders must recognise that there are limits to the demands that can be made of volunteers.
- The community-based research process is time and labour intensive. The more communities involved and the greater the geographic distances between them, the greater the need for careful planning and co-ordination.
- Frequent communication between members of the research team is important for co-ordination as well as allowing the opportunity for debriefing and emotional support during the process.
- Government departments should be prepared to make alternative contract arrangements when entering into partnership agreements with community organisations.
- Including community focus groups in the research design necessitates defining what is meant by "community", thinking about the way that group interacts with the larger community, and determining realistic expectations for that group.

6.2 Effects of Participating

Survivors

The women survivors found their participation in the study to be a positive experience and said that they would not hesitate to do it again if asked. Some of the benefits they identified were the opportunity to use their experience to benefit others and the realisation that others cared about what they had been through. Having the opportunity to tell their stories made many women feel better about themselves, stronger and more competent. Thus, it can accurately be said that this research process proved to be empowering for at least some of the survivors.

Although many women experienced negative emotions at some point in the process, not one woman expressed any regret about participating. The interview itself seems to have been a generally positive experience. Although some spoke about experiencing feelings of fear before and after the interview, there was no one who expressed concern that her

participation in the study had endangered her further or had led to any negative consequences for her in her community. It seems the memories of the abuse are still able to generate some pain, but this is overshadowed by the women's sense of pride in having survived the ordeal and having moved on with their lives. The benefits of participation outweighed the costs for the women in this study.

It is interesting to note that many of the women were shocked to discover that they were not alone in their communities. In spite of the fact that people in small communities believe that they live in a fish-bowl environment where everyone knows the details of everyone else's life, there is still such silence around the issue of abuse that some women lived for many years in abusive relationships and never knew that there were other women in the same community living in similar situations. A reduced sense of being isolated in their communities has been an important side effect of this study for many women. The outrage expressed when they read the community reports is an indication that many survivors had seen woman abuse as a personal experience rather than a societal phenomenon. Participation in this project seemed to help some of the survivors make a transition from personal to political.

Community Researchers

Hearing the women's stories had a powerful impact on the community researchers. They reported experiencing a range of emotions, from anger and frustration to grief and exhaustion. Not only were the interviews emotionally taxing; even more so, the reading of the transcripts became what one described as a "burden". Some of the community researchers had little prior experience in domestic violence work, but even those with many years of experience in the field were unprepared for the emotional effects of the research. It is recommended for future studies of this type that some time be spent educating participants about vicarious trauma and ways to minimise its effects.

These negative emotions were balanced for the community researchers by their admiration and respect for the women survivors whom they came to know through this project. Increased understanding of the issue of woman abuse and a new appreciation of the courage and strength of the survivors were benefits identified by all the community researchers. That courage proved to be somewhat infectious, it would seem, as some of the researchers spoke of their own determination to speak out now about the issue in their communities. "A wonderful opportunity," was how the community researchers described the benefits they gained through the unique experience and the acquisition of new research skills. Perhaps the best indication that the research project was empowering can be seen in the fact that they felt they had made a contribution to something of lasting importance.

An important factor in the positive response of the community researchers to the overall experience can be seen in the interaction among the research team. The group dynamics at training sessions and meetings were described as "fun", and the commitment of the community researchers throughout the long process is testimony to the obvious bond that formed between the members of the team. Community researchers and project leaders alike enjoyed the meals and leisure time together in the evenings. For researchers hoping

to use a similar methodology, the importance of time spent together in such relaxed activities cannot be underestimated. Of course, such time might have been wasted had it not been for the collaborative research approach that set the tone for each person to feel like a valued member of the team.

Project Leaders

The emotional effects of the *ORWAS* project were similar for the project leaders and the community researchers. All felt that reading the interview transcripts was difficult and sometimes overwhelming. They also appreciated the contribution the survivors had made by describing their experiences, and the project leaders found themselves very attached to and involved in the project, partly due to the emotional content of the material.

The feeling of shame identified by one Justice Canada researcher raises an issue for future government studies on woman abuse. In asking women survivors of abuse to recount their experiences, there is an implicit responsibility for the researchers to hear those accounts and act in response. Many of the survivors expected that "Ottawa" or "the researchers" would take action to address the issues raised by their experiences. There is a more immediate connection between survivors and researchers in this type of research, and the Justice Canada researchers felt the increased burden of responsibility.

Recommendations

- Women survivors can benefit as a result of sharing their stories. Projects should be designed to facilitate this goal.
- The research process should strive in every way to minimise negative effects on those who participate.
- Researchers should be sensitive to the fact that negative emotions may be generated by the telling and the hearing of the stories.
- Issues of safety and confidentiality must be given foremost consideration when interviewing survivors of violence. The safety of community researchers must also be a consideration.
- Using researchers from the communities can be a valuable experience for all concerned if their input is encouraged and appreciated and if team building is a priority.
- Teaching research skills to community members is recommended as it provides a valuable asset for the individuals and can yield data of great quality and depth in rural areas.
- Community researchers should be educated about the possibility of experiencing vicarious trauma in such a project and assisted in dealing with it.
- Involving community members in research on violence against women raises awareness and can empower them, but researchers should be aware that it can also impose a burden of responsibility for them to take action.

6.3 Benefits of a Collaborative Partnership

Survivors

The survivors were glad to have been asked for their views on rural woman abuse. Certainly, one of the benefits of a collaborative partnership between government and community is that hard-to-reach community members, such as survivors of woman abuse, can be located and queried about their opinions and experiences. This type of access to women who have lived through a violent intimate relationship is one of the significant advantages of a government/community partnership.

The survivors appreciated receiving the community reports. Those survivors who had a chance to scrutinise the draft reports endorsed the recommendations for their own community. Many of the survivors had suggestions as to how the reports could be used in their communities. They felt it was important that the reports should be widely distributed to community leaders, agencies and media. Seeing their own words in print was a validation for the women that their experiences and their contribution were significant. For some women, the opportunity to have communicated directly with the federal government on an issue of such importance was empowering.

The survivors are hopeful that some legislative change and public education will be an outcome of the study. However, they expressed uncertainty about whether the research would actually make changes happen in their communities or for abused women more generally. There is a risk of contributing to cynicism about research generally, and government research in particular, if survivors and community members contribute data to the study, expect some change to result, and find that no such change occurs. Such cynicism is not specific to community-based studies; all research projects that do not produce identifiable results may lead to a mistrust of research. Unfortunately, in community-based, participatory research, the expectations of change may be greater because the level of involvement is greater.

Community Researchers

Community researchers were very supportive of the government /community partnership in studying the issue of violence against women in rural areas. They underscored the benefits of knowing the community and of being known in it, for the recruitment of participants for the focus groups, and for the added comfort it provided the survivors. They considered it important to have people who understand rural life involved in the design as well as the implementation of the research. The collaborative, community-based methodology was seen to benefit the community in terms of new skills in the community, new awareness of the issue in the community and a new sense of responsibility to effect change in the community.

Some of the community researchers were optimistic that change would happen in their communities as a result of *ORWAS*. In fact, at the time of the interviews, some were able to report changes that had already happened, and they were very encouraged by these changes. They considered their roles in *ORWAS* to be very important ways of

contributing to their communities. The community researchers also looked forward to the role that CAPRO might play in using the results of *ORWAS* to support future community-level changes.

The community researchers had less sense of how the research would be used at the government level. This is partly a reflection of their lack of familiarity with the ways that research can inform policy. They expressed the hope that the effect of the research process would be felt at many levels: the individual level of the survivors and the community researchers; the community level of the service providers and community members; the provincial level of CAPRO and similar organisations; and the federal level of Justice Canada. Each of these has a role to play in making the most of the collaborative research process.

Project Leaders

The project leaders from Justice Canada and CAPRO were very encouraged by the outcome of their partnership. The project met expectations of Justice Canada at the level of the federal government (providing policy-relevant research findings) and of CAPRO at the level of the community organisation (indicating next steps for community action). The shared development of a research process that respected women survivors, involved community researchers and met the leaders' goals is an achievement of which both Justice Canada and CAPRO can be proud.

Although the partnership between CAPRO and Justice Canada worked very well in many respects, both parties agree that there was a power differential, and both parties consider that these issues should have been worked out in a more direct way. If there is a lesson in these challenges, it is that the parties have to commit themselves to open discussion of these power issues at the beginning of the study, as well as throughout the study as they arise. Feelings of trust and good will are important in making these partnerships work. The problems are not the direct result of the power imbalance. In other words, the solution is not that power be equalised, that all parties must share equally in every decision and every aspect of the research. Power imbalances are inevitable in any government/community partnership. Problems are likely to arise as much out of efforts to share power as they are out of efforts to wield power. In a well-intended effort to be democratic and co-operative, community and government parties may choose to not raise issues that possibly should be raised.

There is a need to define roles in a way that recognises people's expertise, and also the limits to their abilities. Community/government partnerships have to pay close attention to clear role definition among all parties to the research. This requires significant forecasting of what roles might be as the research progresses, including such basic issues as determining research questions and designing the research, but also less obvious issues such as training of community researchers, ownership of the data, dissemination of findings, and responsibility for possible action phases. An early process of determining shared goals can also contribute to the role definition and team building that have been identified as key factors in community-government partnerships.

Recommendations

- It is important to share the findings with the community from which the data originated in a timely fashion.
- Community reports should be made available to organisations and individuals within the communities.
- The community organisation has an important role to play in helping communities use research findings to work towards change.
- Every effort should be made to recognise the unique aspects of abuse in individual communities. Community reports should reflect the specific needs of each community.
- Researchers should be aware that, in community-based participatory research, the expectations of community change may be greater because the level of community involvement is greater.
- Government/community partnerships can yield valuable rewards for both parties in a collaborative research project. Government researchers should consider their unique position in being able to initiate such a process.
- It is important to clarify roles and to address issues of power directly when government is working in partnership with other organisations. Time should be spent in the early stages of the project making sure that all players are clear about and are able to fulfil mutual expectations.
- Leaving research skills in the community can benefit both the individuals receiving the training and the groups they belong to. If the community as a whole is to benefit from these skills, support will need to be in place to facilitate this process.

CONCLUSION

> *"We wanted to ensure we could get at the women. If we were going to do that, we need to be in the community or we need the community contacts. How are we going to get that? We need to make sure that we have credibility with the community. With the contacts that CAPRO had with the people who were right there in the community, with the women, it made a lot of sense to go with that. And for us it didn't matter whether the women had experience with research or not. We thought, we can train them on that. Between the two of us we have a lot of experience in research so we can train them on that. It was more important for us that they had a commitment to the issue and wanted to do something in their communities as well. Because we figured that was the only way this could have a ripple effect. As the federal government going in and doing research, I don't think we ever would have had the same sort of results or impact that the research has had if we just parachuted in and parachuted out. The beauty of this research is that these women are in the communities still and so those skills are still there."*

This quotation, from a Justice Canada researcher, shows the guiding principles of the *ORWAS* project. The community-based nature of the project comes through in so many ways: in the importance of hearing directly from survivors in their communities; in the value placed on having researchers from the communities; in the desire to leave skilled researchers behind in the communities after the research project was complete. In all of these ambitions, *ORWAS* was a remarkable success.

ORWAS engaged survivors and community researchers in a process of determining the central obstacles for rural women living in violent relationships. *ORWAS* allowed survivors in these rural communities to make their experiences known, through a partnership between government (Justice Canada) and a rural, community-based, anti-woman-abuse organisation (CAPRO). The tangible results of the study are six community reports and a synthesis report, all of which will be valuable in future research, lobbying, and policy formation.

The study developed a research method that recognised the responsibility inherent in doing community-based research on woman abuse. In choosing to avoid a "parachute in" approach, the researchers followed the principles of the Research as Empowerment model. Throughout the process, care was taken to empower the women involved and to minimise the negative effects of participation. The survivors and community researchers alike were respected for their knowledge and contributions. The 'empowerment through research' process is a less tangible, but equally valuable result of *ORWAS*: investment in building skills among community people is a positive contribution that research can make. This is in sharp contrast to traditional research methods that take data from "subjects", while providing little in return.

The *ORWAS* study laid the groundwork for social action by contributing to the individual empowerment of the community researchers. The next steps toward social action, based on Horvath's framework, will involve support for those individuals to link with groups, and for groups to have access to resources in order to engage in community-based social action.

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APPENDIX A
REPORTS RELATED TO THE ONTARIO RURAL WOMAN ABUSE STUDY

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